MAHATMA GANDHI

7.9.38.

Mr Wm Rivers
Chairman, 'The Study Circle' Glasgow

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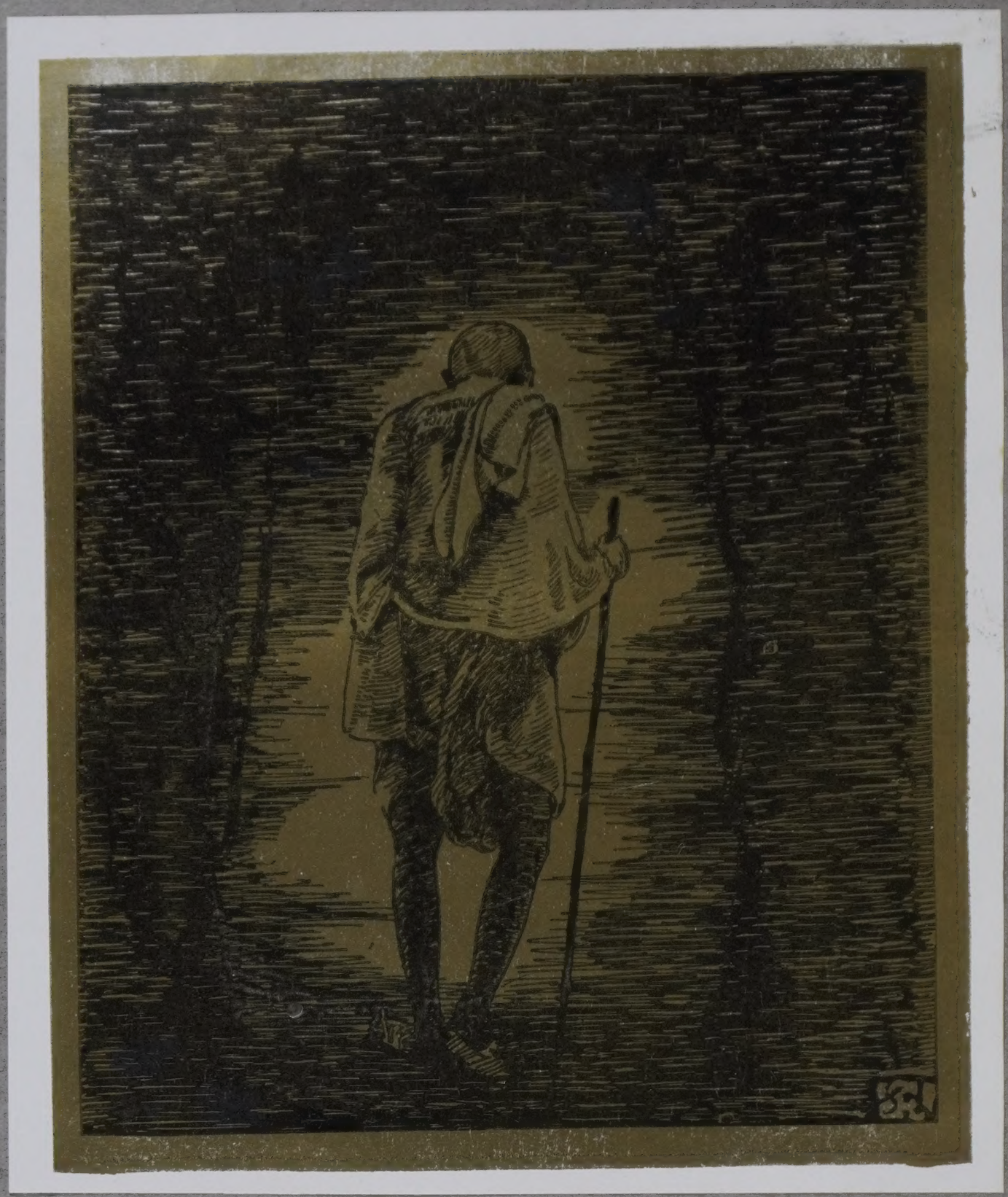
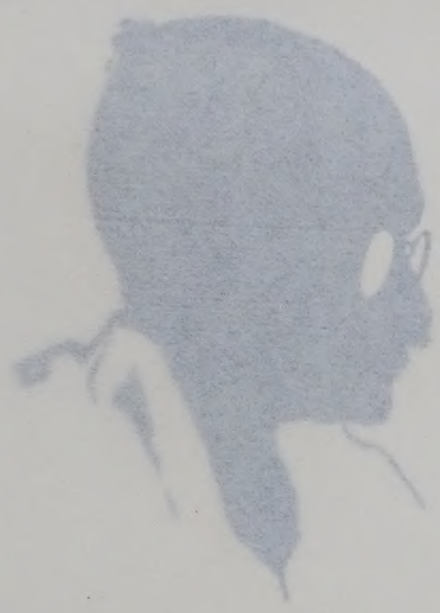


'Lead Kindly Light.'

MAHATMA GANDHI



LONDON
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FETTER HOUSE FETTER LANE
1932

MAHATMA GANDHI

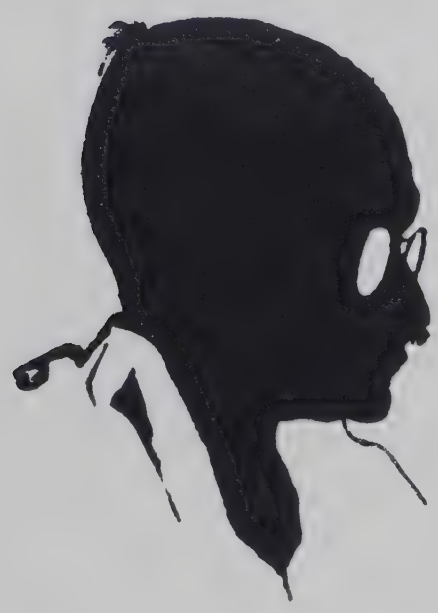
SKETCHES IN PEN PENCIL AND BRUSH

BY

KANU DESAI

WITH AN ESSAY BY

VERRIER ELWIN



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PRELUDE

THIS Introduction will not attempt to recount the life-story of Mahatma Gandhi or to make an exact study of his philosophy. It is simply a series of sketches, in the uninspiring monotone of prose, to accompany Kanu Desai's brilliantly imaginative interpretations of the Mahatma's character. It is perhaps not without significance that an Indian and an Englishman can unite in trying to interpret to East and West alike some aspects of this Master of the art of living, whose message already spans the hemispheres.

In the following pages I have tried to portray Mahatma Gandhi —in my own clumsy and stubborn medium—in the forms in which he has touched my heart and helped me. He will perhaps forgive my impertinence, knowing that what I have written comes simply from my love of him.

V.E.

THE EXPLORER

OF all Kanu Desai's pictures I think my favourite is the one entitled variously "In Search of Truth" or "Lead, Kindly Light." There is spiritual genius as well as great art in this conception of the explorer stepping out into the darkness, with just sufficient light for his immediate needs. G.K. Chesterton has written somewhere of the mystery of the human back; Kanu Desai has caught this mystery—the back of the Mahatma, dignified, bent yet vigorous in its sublime purpose. Who can guess the expression of the face that looks away to that "Yonder" in which Plotinus told us was our true home ? Of what renunciations does not that back tell us, so resolutely turned on "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life," the things that pass away ? It is a true and beautiful thought also to notice that the light upon his path streams from the Mahatma's own heart. The searcher after Truth, who does not veil the light within, does not have to carry a lantern—he has both hands free for service—and he can never be lost in the darkness, for however far he goes there will be light for one step more.

Mahatma Gandhi is an explorer, an adventurer. The first qualification of an adventurer is that he must be adventurous. He must be humble, ready to admit mistakes, ready to learn from every fellow-traveller; he must travel light, not burdened with possessions; he must have an iron discipline and an iron will; and he must have a goal worthy of the pains of the quest. All these the Mahatma possesses—a humility which places himself last among his fellow-creatures, a detachment from all earthly friends and pleasures, a discipline that bends neither to circumstance nor sentiment, and for goal none other than the End for which all men were created, the one satisfaction adequate to the soul's high craving,

God himself, "Eternal Truth, True Love, and Loved Eternity."

Mahatma Gandhi himself uses the word "Experiment" to describe these adventures of his spirit. The expression gives us the picture of a scientist patiently and unweariedly testing possibility after possibility until the exact result is gained, working not in the heat of emotion, but by the light of ascertained laws, reasoned, methodical, peaceful. The Mahatma seems to me to combine the qualities of the scientist and the explorer. His laboratory is the whole world. His experiments range over every aspect of life. The daring and scope of these experiments invest the Mahatma with something of the radiance of an ideal figure of the romantic age. But the experiments themselves are conducted with the scientific accuracy of a modern scholar. There is not a trace of sentiment in the Mahatma. He is untouched by passion or excitement. His life is based on reason. His life is not indeed logical or consistent, but the lives of great scientists cannot be harnessed to consistency—they are ever discovering new truth and they are bound to re-adjust their lives in the light of it.

The Mahatma's life then is a record of daring adventure and exact experiment. In his youth he was already testing the baser elements of experience. He tried meat-eating and smoking. In England, he played at being the English gentleman. These experiments did not give a favourable reaction. He tried again. He explored the possibilities of a simple diet, of reduced expenses, of the establishment of love as a working principle in human relations. He felt happier. He enlarged his laboratory. In South Africa, the chief home of his experiments, he attempted new ways of education at Tolstoy Farm; he dropped corporal punishment from his scheme of discipline and found it worked. He made his first attempts in a sort of flexible co-monasticism at Phoenix Farm. He continued to experiment in diet, schemes of sanitation, medicine. Slowly he worked out his principle of Satyagraha, that moral substitute for war for which the world is yearning. As time went on,

in Africa and in India, he explored the whole of life in order to unify it, and to find the One Truth beneath its manifold appearances. He studied the technique of fasting. His experiment in uncooked food was a failure, and he did not hesitate to admit the fact to his friends. He took up the economics of cattle breeding. He investigated the vast problem of sex. He is familiar with every detail of practical psychology. Nowhere has he been more successful than in working out new forms of human relationships, between man and woman, caste and caste, religion and religion, nation and nation. The greatest adventure of all was Khadi—a stupendous attempt to bring religion into economics. He has explored the possibilities of human life; he has discovered the secret of strenuous living; he has found that love is the heart of all things and truth their goal. "This much I can say with assurance as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of truth can only follow a complete realisation of Ahimsa (Love)."

The explorer is still upon the road. His great heart is yet unsatisfied; his eager mind longs for a more precise understanding; he seeks the entire realisation of Truth in his own heart. But in the words of a Christian mystic, "God is the one Being who is never sought in vain." We may say the same of Truth. It cannot be sought, as Mahatma Gandhi has sought it, without at last being found.

Mahatma Gandhi's residence Satyagraha Ashram on the bank of the river Sabarmati.

THE ASCETIC

IN 1915 Mahatma Gandhi unveiled a portrait of Mr. Gokhale, and during his speech revealed the inner motive of his asceticism. "I saw in the recitation," referring to a beautiful recitation given to him, "that God is with them whose garment is dusty and tattered. My thoughts immediately went to the end of my garment; I examined and found that it is not dusty and it is not tattered; it is fairly spotless and clean. God is not in me." The sentence gives the ideal foundation of the Mahatma's asceticism. He is a citizen of a country impoverished beyond imagination. His heart is always with the hard-pressed multitudes living with pitiful anxiety on the border-line of starvation. He must serve them; "there is no worship purer or more pleasing to God than selfless service of the poor." But how is he to serve them? By becoming one with them. For the Mahatma, therefore, asceticism means selflessness. It is the widest vision, the largest charity. Renunciation is service.

So the Mahatma has from his early years entered on the task of the progressive simplification of his own life. "To live above the means befitting a poor country," he has said, "is to live on stolen food." He has adopted manual labour and has filled his life with ceaseless toil. He has reduced his food to the smallest quantity possible. His clothing is that of the poorest peasant. I once had the honour of washing his famous loin-cloth and I was able to see how the very minimum of cloth was used, even the ends being cut away to provide handkerchiefs. He travels third-class, and thus knows by experience the woes of the worst treated passengers in the world. He exercises no copyright over his many books. His cottage at Sabarmati, his hut at Keradi where he was arrested, are plain, sparely-furnished dwellings where his humblest follower can feel at home. He writes his countless letters on tiny

scraps of paper, used with a rigid economy. For him simplicity of living is a religious adventure, an act of worship. "Of all the myriads of names of God, Daridranarayana (God of the poor) is the most sacred, in as much as it represents the untold millions of poor people as distinguished from the few rich people."

Poverty is not the whole of asceticism; there must also be control. This is the inner discipline that lifts the soul to God. In exact accord with the tradition of Catholic monasticism, Mahatma Gandhi practices control of the five senses. The eyes must be cast down lest they wander in search of alluring objects. The taste must be checked by the right attitude to food. Hearing, touch and smell must not be excited. "What I want," he has said, "is iron discipline." This control is Brahmacharya, which means "not merely mechanical celibacy, but complete control over all the organs and senses enabling one to attain perfect freedom from all passion and hence from sin in thought, word and deed." There must also be control over the emotions, so that we are not elevated by success or depressed by failure—indifference to the pairs of opposites, as the Gita teaches. The Mahatma has mastered even his sleep; he can go to sleep at will at any time, and he can awake fresh and alert whenever he is needed.

Renunciation, discipline, detachment lead to self-purification and thus to Truth. If we would become "torch-bearers lighting the path of a weary world towards the goal of Ahimsa (Love), there is no other way out of it, save that of self-purification and penance." "This spiritual weapon of self-purification, intangible as it seems, is the most potent means of revolutionising one's environment and for loosening external shackles. It works subtly and invisibly; it is an intensive process and though it might often seem a weary and long-drawn out process, it is the straightest way to liberation, the surest and the quickest, and no efforts can be too great for it. What it requires is faith—an unshakeable mountain-like faith that flinches from nothing." This purification is essential to

the universal spirit of love. "Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification; without self-purification the observance of the law of Ahimsa must remain an empty dream; God can never be realised by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification therefore must mean purification in all the walks of life and purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings. But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion."

Yet there is nothing morbid or fantastic about this renunciation. The Mahatma's asceticism does not express itself in sitting on a bed of spikes, but in the careful keeping of accounts. His asceticism is always regulated by common sense, which he has defined as a "realised sense of proportion." Self-purification demands a vigorous and healthy body. "Indifference to physical comforts is good when it comes from enlightenment; but it is criminal when it is the result of slothfulness or ignorance or both." Finally the Mahatma's asceticism has not given him a morbid fear of his fellow creatures, but has liberated him into the largest possible circle of pure and ennobling relationships. Mrs. Polak has written of his "womanliness"—a quality not often associated with the monk, but a striking characteristic of St. Francis of Assisi—"his great faith, great fortitude, great devotion, great patience, great tenderness and great sympathy. Women could sense that in him they had found a fellow-traveller, one who had passed along the road they, too, were travelling, and could give him an affection deep, pure and untouched by any play of sex emotion." The Mahatma's asceticism is of the open air. See him asleep beneath the stars, restful and calm. I associate him with growing flowers, fresh fruit, the wide and open river, the prayer before the morning star has risen, the walk in the unsullied air of dawn.

THE LABOURER

IT has been suggested of late that Young India, in order to gain more virility and strength to throw off the British yoke, should abandon religion and eat meat. Mahatma Gandhi has a less drastic plan. He simply proposes that everyone should return, in greater or less degree, to manual work. "Body-labour is a duty imposed by nature upon mankind." Through active, humble, physical labour, manliness will return to India, the number of unemployed graduates will decrease, and the pathetic army of clerks will be reduced. The Mahatma himself became a coolie in order to raise the coolies. "I spent the best of my time in South Africa working for the working men. I used to live with them and shared their joys and sorrows." We must labour with our hands as an act of union with the poor. "I cannot conceive any higher way of worshipping God than by doing for the poor, in His name, the work they themselves do." Then again it is his aim to make every village a self-supporting unit, and every man should be—as far as possible—self-supporting. This is the meaning of Swadeshi, which is not "a boycott movement undertaken by way of revenge, but a religious principle." "Swadeshi is that spirit within us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote." It is almost impossible to follow this principle without taking to manual work. To the Mahatma, manual work is not a rather degrading occupation to be adopted at great self-sacrifice; it is an act of worship, a task of dignity, an expression of man's creative impulse. His aim is "to recharge the whole psychological atmosphere of the village home with creative energy."

He has founded his monastery at Sabarmati on this principle. The life at Sabarmati is one of strenuous labour, in the kitchen,

in cleaning the latrines, in carpentry, in spinning and weaving. It is not easy to understand the Mahatma without passing through the spinning and weaving sheds. When you do so, you begin to realise how much he must have gained from this despised body labour, the habit of concentration which enables you to draw a perfect thread of even count, the habit of accuracy essential to the weaver as he plans the number of threads in his warp, the habit of economy vital in an industry where there is no borderline for waste. This is the new Yoga of action, the Yoga of economy, accuracy and humility, which does not confer supernormal powers on the few, but brings food and clothing to the many. The old Yoga was a sort of spiritual capitalism, and it was open to many abuses. But you cannot exploit the virtues of humility and love, and the new Yoga of Khadi is the true spiritual exercise of an awakening people, of a social order based on love and sacrifice.

For Mahatma Gandhi has put his whole philosophy of body-labour into the spinning-wheel. The Charkha is no enemy of culture, it is its symbol. "Spinning and weaving," it has been said, "are as old as the Vedas. In fact, the weaver like the vedanti was the first superb product of Hindu genius. The Brahma Sutras of the one and the Karpasa Sutras of the other furnished the material out of which the almost perfect system of Brahman philosophy and the finest fabrics of cotton were fashioned and woven. When Egypt built her massive pyramids and Babylon's King Hammurabi wrote his great Code, India was already set on this unique path. The vedantin, the तत्त्ववाय (the weaver of the eternal verities) clothed the nescience of man's soul, while the weaver, the तन्तुवाय (the weaver of cotton threads) clothed the nakedness of man's body. The story of India's golden age and of her immortal civilisation is summed up in the lives of these two, the vedantin, the true seer, and the weaver, the real artist." So write the authors of "Hand-Spinning and Hand-Weaving"—a

book which should be read widely in England and by all those in India who do not believe in Khadi.

The Charkha has its economic value as a solvent of Indian poverty. As a subsidiary industry, it has limitless possibilities: it requires no capital, it demands no special skill, its products are certain of a market, it is independent of climatic conditions. It is an insurance against famine and unemployment. Perhaps its spiritual and moral value is even greater. It is a bond of union between rich and poor, Hindu and Moslem, Parsee and Christian. It is a pledge of simplicity, a challenge to sacrifice, an unfailing discipline of the character. It has the power of preserving the life of the home, and of re-building the corporate life of the village. "It will do away with begging as a means of livelihood. It will remove our enforced idleness. It will steady the mind. And I verily believe that when millions take to it as a sacrament, it will turn our faces Godward." "Every revolution of the wheel spins peace, good-will and love." The Yoga of Khadi is the pivotal doctrine of the Mahatma's philosophy of universal love.

The Mahatma is a brilliant writer, a far-seeing diplomat, a great religious leader. But it is his pride to regard himself as a simple peasant. At his trial in 1922, he was content to describe himself as a farmer and a weaver by profession. There could be no dignity greater than that.

General view of Satyagraha Ashram with Mahatma Gandhi's Cottage in front.

THE POET AND ARTIST

FOR Mahatma Gandhi, Art is Action. "The hungry millions ask for one poem, invigorating food." Invited to speak on music at the National Music Association of Ahmedabad, he seemed quite unable to talk of music as an end in itself. Music meant unison, the harmony of all the people of India which is Swaraj. Music was impossible in the presence of filth and squalor. "If we would see music in millions of poor homes, we should all wear Khadi and spin. The music we have had to-day was sweet indeed, but it is a privilege of the favoured few. The music of the spinning-wheel can be a free gift to all, and is therefore sweeter. It is the hope and solace and mainstay of the millions, and for me therefore the truly good music."

And so, according to Miltonic precept, this poet of the Karma-Marga (path of action) has made his life a true poem. Nowhere has his dramatic genius, his instinct for poetry and romance, been more clearly revealed than in the Great March to Dandi. In India the feet—the lotus feet—have always been objects of worship, and Kanu Desai has illustrated with exquisite art the reverence which India felt for those bare defenceless feet treading their weary but exultant way to freedom—a freedom of the soul which the thundering legions in the background could never hope to gain. What a genius planned that march! None but a poet could have done it. It has the artist's touch upon it. It was politics taken out of doors—the long road winding into the distance, the waving palms, the wide-stretching sands, and the broad sea untaxed and unrestricted at Dandi. Here was the Odyssey of modern India. It was her supreme moral adventure, expressed in a medium simple and intense. The March into the Transvaal was a former poem in the same style, but now the art of the master was grown mature.

The poet in Mahatma Gandhi finds daily satisfaction in the

simple and permanent forms of nature. He is not indifferent to Beauty. He delights in "nature's hospitality"—"the enchanting beauty of the Himalayas, their bracing climate, and the soothing green that envelops you." He admired the magnificent confluence of the three rivers —the Triveni—at Allahabad. He has written enthusiastically of Cape Comorin, "where the sea daily washes in adoration the feet of Hind Mata (Mother India)." "When I admire the wonders of the sunset or the beauty of the moon," he says, "my soul expands in worship of the Creator." He finds in the purer forms of tree-worship "a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolises true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom, which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God." He has that sense of kinship with all life that in Europe is called a poetic sentiment, but in India is recognised as religious. Once when Mirabehn brought him at night a bunch of babul-tree leaves for application to the gut of the carding-bow, it was noticed that every leaf was tightly folded in sleep. "Of course," said Gandhi, indignation and pity in his eyes, "trees are living beings just like ourselves. They live and breathe, they feed and drink as we do, and like us they need sleep. It is a wretched thing to go and tear the leaves off a tree at night when it is resting." "Surely you heard what I said at the meeting yesterday about the poor flowers, and how deeply it pains me that people should pluck those masses of delicate blossoms to fling in my face and hang round my neck. We should feel a more living bond between ourselves and the rest of animate creation."

Like Wordsworth, Mahatma Gandhi values Nature and Art primarily for their moral power. "All true art must help the soul to realize its inner self. In my own case I find that I can do entirely without external forms in my soul's realisation. I can claim, therefore, that there is truly sufficient Art in my life, though you might not see what you call works of Art about me. My room may have blank walls; and I may even dispense with the roof, so that I may gaze

out upon the starry heavens overhead that stretch in an unending expanse of beauty. What conscious art of man can give me the scene that opens before me when I look up at the sky above with all its shining stars ? This, however, does not mean that I refuse to accept the value of human productions of art, but only that I personally feel how inadequate these are compared with the eternal symbols of beauty in nature."

Any art which is the expression of the soul and that helps the soul to realise its inner self is dear to Mahatma Gandhi. The "ancient and sacred art" of music has a special value. The culture of the Sabarmati Ashram is largely bound up with music, the beautiful poems sung with such devotion at the prayers. "The hymns of Samaveda are a mine of music, and no ayat of the Koran can be recited unmusically. David's Psalms transport you to raptures and remind you of the hymns from the Samaveda." The Mahatma was once asked about the influence of music on his life. "Music," he replied, "has given me peace. I can remember occasions when music instantly tranquillized my mind when I was greatly agitated over something. Music has helped me to overcome anger. I can recall occasions when a hymn sank deep into me though the same thing expressed in prose had failed to touch me. When I hear Gita verses melodiously recited, I never grow weary of hearing and the more I hear the deeper sinks the meaning into my heart. Melodious recitations of the Ramayana which I heard in my childhood left on me an impression which years have not obliterated or weakened. I distinctly remember how when once the hymn 'The path of the Lord is meant for the brave, not the coward' was sung to me in an extra ordinarily sweet tune, it moved me as it had never before. In 1907 while in the Transvaal I was almost fatally assaulted, the pain of the wounds was relieved when at my instance Olive Doke gently sang to me 'Lead kindly Light.'"

Music therefore is an aid to the expression or the realisation of moral truth. "The outward forms have value only in so far as they

are the expression of the inner spirit of man." We are not to seek Truth through Beauty so much as to seek Beauty through Truth. "I see and find Beauty through Truth. All Truths, not merely true ideas, but truthful faces, truthful pictures, truthful songs, are highly beautiful. Whenever men begin to see Beauty in Truth, then Art will arise." "Truth is the first thing to be sought for and Beauty and Goodness will then be added unto you."

The Mahatma is thus a realist in art. He did not care for a picture portraying Christ in Indian dress and with Indian features. Christ, he pointed out, was a Jew of Palestine and it was not "truth" for artists to paint him as an Italian, a Dutchman or an Indian. Suppose an American were to paint Sri Krishna in European dress with a top-hat. Would we not feel it to be incongruous ? Perhaps the Mahatma does not fully appreciate the truth of imagination, which yet comes so close to that intuitive insight which he greatly prizes.

The Mahatma must not, however, be regarded as an enemy even of conscious formal art in any of its beautiful and holy manifestations. But it is the art of action—art dramatised in the fields of human suffering—that chiefly moves him. And all art, like all action, must lead us to the supreme Goal. "Even sunsets and sunrises would be mere hindrances if they did not help me to think of the Creator. Anything which is a hindrance to the flight of the soul is a delusion and a snare." "The outward has no meaning to me at all except in so far as it helps the inward."

THE REBEL

"THE nations," says Mahatma Gandhi, "have progressed both by evolution and revolution. The one is as necessary as the other. Death, which is an eternal verity, is revolution, as birth and after is slow and steady evolution. Death is as necessary for man's growth as life itself. God is the greatest Revolutionist the world has ever known or will know. He sends deluges. He sends storms where a moment ago there was calm. He levels down mountains which he builds with exquisite care and infinite patience. I watch the sky and it fills me with awe and wonder. In the serene blue sky, both of India and England, I have seen clouds gathering and bursting with a fury which has struck me dumb. History is more a record of wonderful revolution than of so-called ordered progress—no history more so than the English."

All his life Mahatma Gandhi has been in opposition. In his youth he had to fight the rigid orthodoxy and caste regulations of his own clan. Soon after going to England he revolted against the elaborate and artificial standard of living that he saw around him. In South Africa he became the champion of all who were oppressed. To-day he has enlarged the scope of his revolt until there are no material standards which he does not question and no vested interests which he does not criticise. But how different he is from many of the rebels of the past! His revolt is "first pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." The words are used in the New Testament to describe the "wisdom that is from above," the divine wisdom that sees all things in their right proportions. The rebellion of the Mahatma is the spirit of Truth in action, fighting its way against a stubborn, hostile world. His rebellion is untainted by self-seeking; it has the mark of moral splendour upon it; it is so

full of courtesy and chivalry that you hardly realise how fundamentally rebellious his rebellion is.

We are apt to think nowadays of Mahatma Gandhi as primarily a rebel against the British Government. But this political revolution is a mere incident, a detail in a vast war of ideas. It is not the British Government that the Mahatma opposes so much as the entire scheme of civilisation, the whole cycle of ideas for which it stands. "If British rule were replaced to-morrow by Indian rule based on modern methods India would be none the better, except that she would be able then to retain some of money that is drained away to England." The modern civilisation of the West is not only destructive of the ancient Eastern culture of which every Indian must be the trustee, but with its multiplication of material comforts it is also morally ennervating; it is in danger of being dominated not by spiritual values, but by financial considerations; and it introduces a heart-breaking disparity between the lives of rich and poor. "In so far as the loin-cloth spells simplicity let it represent Indian civilisation." "European civilisation," he wrote in 1931, "is no doubt suited for the Europeans but it will mean ruin for India if we endeavour to copy it. The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is an evil, and I make bold to say that the Europeans themselves will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves."

His "Confession of Faith," written in 1909 when the influence of Tolstoy was strong upon him, declares that "India's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past fifty years. The railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors, and such like have all to go, and the so-called upper classes have to learn to live consciously, religiously and deliberately the simple peasant life, knowing it to be a life giving true happiness." Note the words, "consciously, religiously deliberately"—it is no emotional or sentimental revolution, it is a reasoned and deliberate conversion.

Modern civilisation and its implications, machinery and the slavery it brings, such medicine as makes vice safe and unpunished, imperialism with its moral heritage of pride and injustice, militarism that threatens the very existence of man upon this planet, are the main objects of the Mahatma's criticisms. But neither does he spare religious despotism or evil social customs among his own people. He has declared war on untouchability, "the snake with a thousand mouths, through each of which it shows its poisonous fangs," on child-marriages, on insanitation, on every form of local cruelty or intolerance.

His philosophy of revolution is the antithesis to that of Lenin. His aim is always to convert his opponents, never to destroy them. His sole weapon is that of love, which does not burn others but only burns itself. He does not desire violently to dispossess the princes or capitalists of their wealth, but rather by his friendship and example to persuade them to hold it in trust for the masses, and keeping but little for themselves, use it on their behalf. "By the non-violent method we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism." Devoted servant of the poor that he is, he will be no party to any form of class-hatred. "I do not bear any ill to the capitalists, I can think of doing them no harm. But I want, by means of suffering to awaken them to their sense of duty. I want to melt their hearts and get them to render justice to their less fortunate brethren." The Textile Labour Union of Ahmedabad is a perfect example of the application of the Mahatma's principles in the field of the relations of capital and labour.

Nor will the Mahatma force his views on others. He does not care for mass-conversion. He must reason, persuade, educate. Those who are impatient with him forget that there are no forces stronger or more permanent than the forces of love and reason. This strange gentle chivalrous revolutionary is irresistible.

I am privileged to write these pages in Mahatma Gandhi's own cottage at the Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati. From the cottage you look out across the great expanse of sand and water of the Sabarmati

Its foundations are deeply and truly laid in the kingdom of God. No oppression of the poor has gone to create it. Love and devotion and service are its decorations. No military pomp reigns within its borders, but only the peaceful harmony of human souls. Race and colour distinctions have no place in it. Not a clash of religious controversy mars its harmony. Its empire is the heart."

Mahatma Gandhi's Cottage at Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati.

THE SPIRIT OF JOY

EVERY great man has the capacity to rest and the capacity for laughter. Without laughter greatness is a stolid and portentous thing, and crumbles at the first touch of criticism. Laughter has kept Mahatma Gandhi young for sixty years. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu speaks of "that happy laugh of his which seems to hold all the undimmed radiance of the world's childhood in its depths." To be greeted by his smile early in the morning is sufficient to set you right for the day. He is the most delightful companion, full of mirth —I think "mirth" is the right word, a sort of infectious gaiety, too light for humour, too tolerant and genial for wit, perhaps "amused love" would be a possible description. He has a charming trick of humorous self-depreciation, as when he calls himself a "crank" or a "quack" and chuckles at some recollection of outraged authority which he has ignored. This habit of mirth draws children to him, naturally, inevitably. He delights in their company, as he delights in all the Franciscan joys—birds, flowers, animals, the whole of nature.

The great trials of his spirit have not checked this joy; they have fostered it. When in England he started his first tentative renunciations, he found that "his life was certainly more truthful and his soul knew no bounds of joy." In 1922 it was said that he went to jail "with abundant joy," and he wrote to Mr. Andrews from prison that he was as happy as a bird. Once he said, "Suffering cheerfully endured ceases to be suffering and is transmitted into an ineffable joy."

"His is a liberated soul," exclaims Tagore. "If anyone strangles me, I shall be crying for help; but if Gandhi were strangled, I am sure he would not cry. He may laugh at his strangler; and if he has to die, he will die smiling."

THE HEART OF SORROWS

THE history of modern India is the history of a great suffering. There is not only the misery and hunger of the villagers impoverished by a century of alien rule; there are not only the natural sorrows of mankind incident to death and separation, disunion and calamity; but there is the strange new sorrow that comes from the vision of a great ideal and the sense of impotence to reach it. Modern India has seen a vision of the ideal Motherland, free and bearing her right place in the world. She tries to grasp her vision, and withdraws her hands bleeding and broken by the lathi blows. Her noblest sons have suffered the humiliations of imprisonment. Even her children and women have not escaped the cudgel or the bullet. Thwarted at every turn, you are not surprised to see a great sorrow in the eyes of modern India. But it is not only from outside that sorrow presses upon the new Indian idealist. He has a vision of a united India, and yet faction upon faction seem determined to break his dream. He longs for a country purified and enlightened, and he is burdened by the immense task of freeing illiterate people from superstition. He wishes to see his fellow country-men delivered from drugs and liquor, and here both human nature and a government which cares primarily for its revenue combine to defeat him.

Of this general and diffused suffering, Mahatma Gandhi is the natural focus. All the sorrows of his country meet in his great heart. He is a man of extreme and delicate sensitiveness, capable of that intense feeling which is the ennobling difference between one man and another. I am not thinking now of his personal sufferings, his sicknesses, the spiritual isolation of prison life that he has so often endured, the endless attacks upon him, the betrayals that he has known, the troubled weather in which his whole

public life has been spent. He is as detached from these as he is from his personal joys. I am thinking rather how the pains of oppressed humanity everywhere must weigh upon his spirit. The medieval mystic, Lady Julian, prayed for three wounds from God, and one of these was the wound of compassion. You will notice, in some of the pictures of this book, an expression on the face of the Mahatma which is nothing but a universal compassion, a tender pitifulness. What did the Mahatma feel as he nursed the Zulus in South Africa, and tended the weals caused by the lashes? How costly to his sensitive spirit must have been the long-drawn struggle against injustice in South Africa? In India, the sorrows of the poor are always with him. "The famine-stricken skeletons of men and women in Orissa haunt me in my waking hours and in my dreams." The burden of communal division presses upon him. Shortly before the Great Fast of 1924, he gave his friends a glimpse of his pain. "I was violently shaken by the riots.... I was writhing in deep pain, and yet I had no remedy. The news of Kohat set the smouldering mass aflame. I spent two nights in restlessness and pain. On Wednesday I knew the remedy.... I must do penance..... My penance is the prayer of a bleeding heart for forgiveness for sins unwittingly committed." Here is the true spiritual triumph—not to be indifferent to pain, but to accept it, and transform it into an ally. The urge to penance, the sense of responsibility for the sins of others, ennobles suffering and makes of it a love-weapon capable of converting the most stony heart.

THE DEVOTEE

"I claim," says Mahatma Gandhi, "to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I were to be cut to pieces I trust God would give me the strength not to deny Him, but to assert that He is." The Mahatma is a religious devotee who preserves in his religion the finest qualities of the ancient Bhakti Marga (the Pathway of Devotion) with its stress on penitence and purification, its faith in love as the immediate way to God, its tender wondering devotion to the Adorable. At the same time, he is characteristic of the rational, critical spirit of Young India, impatient of the cumbrous paraphernalia of orthodoxy, hostile to every form of communalism and exclusiveness, insistent that religious faith must be expressed in the remodelling of society after the mind of God.

The Mahatma's bhakti is a remarkable combination of the "world-renouncing" and the "world-transforming" attitudes to life. In his stress on prayer, on monasticism, on the supreme reality of the spiritual world, he resembles the otherworldly mystics of the Middle Ages. Here he is akin to Rolle, Suso, Tukaram, Kabir, Al Ghazzali. In his appreciation of vital economic issues, his eagerness for the purification of public life, his realisation of the needs of labourers and peasants, he joins hands with the reformers and practical idealists of the modern world. Here he is akin to Wilberforce, Maurice, Ram Mohun Roy, Gokhale, Ranade. He is at once Ramkrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda.

The basis of any man's religion is his belief in God. God is Truth, and "to me religion means truth." The Mahatma worships God as Life, Truth, Light, Love, the Supreme Good. He is the ruler and transformer of the heart. He is "personal to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch." "God," he says again, "is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness;

God is the source of Light and Life; and yet He is above and beyond all these." He is purity and may be known only by the pure in heart. "The purer I try to become, the nearer to God I feel myself to be. How much more should I be near to Him when my faith is not a mere apology, as it is today, but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white as the snows on their peaks ?"

The "world-renouncing" aspect of the Mahatma's bhakti is seen first in his stress on prayer. Kanu Desai has given us a glimpse of the daily prayers at the Ashram, again (if I may stress the point) a religion of the open-air, the broad river flowing below, the vast spaces of the stars above, the worshippers absorbed, still and concentrated, held in the contact of the eternal verities. "Humble and constant endeavour and silent prayer are always my two trusty companions along the weary but beautiful path that all seekers must tread."

Prayer brings us into living touch with the real world of truth and love which is the proper home of spiritual humanity. In comparison all else is worthless and transitory. "My Mahatmaship is worthless. It is due to my outward activities, due to my politics, which is the least part of me and is therefore evanescent. What is of abiding worth is my insistence on truth, non-violence, and brahmacharya (purity) which is the real part of me. That permanent part of me, however small, is not to be despised. It is my all." "Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal." "There is nothing permanent, nothing everlasting save God Himself."

But we renounce the world only in order to transform it. The Mahatma has spoken of "my intense longing to lose myself in the Eternal, and become merely a lump of clay in the Potter's divine hands, so that my service may become more certain because uninterrupted by the baser self in me." God is Pure Act, as the Catholic philosophers have said, and perfect contemplation frees

the soul to act unweariedly even as God acts. Or the process may operate in the reverse direction, and we may come to God through action. "Self-realisation I hold to be impossible without service of and identification with the poorest." "God of Himself seeks for His seat in the heart of him who serves his fellow men." "He who would be a devotee must serve the suppressed and the poverty—stricken by body, soul and mind." "He who spins before the poor, inviting them to do likewise, serves God as no one else does. The Lord says in the Gita: He who gives me even a trifle, such as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf, in the spirit of devotion, is my servant. And He hath His foot-stool where live the poorest and the lowliest and the lost. The work of spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice. A prayerful heart is the vehicle, and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the 'untouchables' from a full heart, they truly pray; those who spin prayerfully for the poor and the needy, they truly pray."

Religion must be the foundation of every department of life. "Human society is a ceaseless growth, an unfoldment in terms of spirituality." "Politics divorced from religion, has absolutely no meaning." "Economics, to be worth anything, must be capable of being reduced to terms of religion and spirituality." Public life must be based on truth and sacrifice. "None can officiate at the altar of Swaraj, who do not approach it with a pure hand and a pure heart." So with the unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Mahatma Gandhi looks forward to the ideal spiritual "city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He would not use the symbolism of a city, for it has not been a Jerusalem or a Rome that has captured his imagination. His vision would be of the perfect village—shall we say, not the new Jerusalem, but the new Vedchhi coming down from heaven. Yet there is great truth in Mr. C. F. Andrews' beautiful words: "There is a spiritual city which he has been building up out of an imperishable fabric.

River. On the further bank you see in panorama many of the forces against which the Mahatma is in revolt. There are the tall chimneys of the factories which have helped to destroy the hand-spinning industry. There is the palace of the Collector, symbol of a foreign domination which has sapped the manliness of India. There is the railway which has done so much to ruin the quiet peasant life of the villages. Opposite are the low roofs of the simple dwellings of the Ashram. The forces of the world and the forces of the spirit are here in vivid symbol arrayed against one another—machine-force against soul-force, force of arms against love-force. As I write, the river is slowly rising: soon the dry and barren sand-hills will disappear, and what all through the hot weather has been a tiny stream will soon be a great and irresistible torrent. Is this too a symbol? Is a new civilisation based on love and justice and sacrifice, about to flow down from the hills of God into the arid desert of our modern world?

THE LOVER OF MEN

"LOVE, which is the striving for the union of human souls and the activity derived from it, is the highest and only law of human life," Tolstoy wrote once to Mahatma Gandhi, and he went on to point out that "the use of force is incompatible with love as the fundamental law of life; that as soon as violence is permitted, in whichever case it may be, the insufficiency of the law of love is acknowledged, and by this the very law of love is denied." The great civilisation of the West has been built upon violence, and therefore Love as a guiding principle of the destinies of nations has been regarded as pure idealism. But the Mahatma's primary aim has been to establish love as the normal and practicable relation between human beings. He has taken love out of its domestic seclusion and introduced it into world politics. Love is the one secret of India's freedom. "If India adopted the doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduced it in her politics, Swaraj would descend upon her as from heaven.' This means that we are never to have any hatred of people but only of principles. "The man who is saturated with the spirit of non-violence has never any quarrel with a single individual. His opposition is directed to a system, to the evil that is in man but not against the man himself. Your quarrel, therefore, is not with the British people, but with the Imperialistic spirit of exploitation of the weak races of the earth." We must be prepared to suck the poison out of a dying enemy bitten by a snake.

This spirit of love is the controlling factor of the Mahatma's own life. "Non-violence" he says, "is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed." "I hold myself to be incapable of hating any being on earth. By a long course of prayerful discipline I have ceased for over forty years to hate

anybody." Like every true lover, he is very humble and very daring. He loves his followers so much that he dares to ask anything of them, and yet he claims no followers and places himself last of all. His love is seen in his accessibility. He is open to everyone and interested in everyone. He has the gift of suffering fools gladly. For him love is a fine art, and courtesy the finest part of it. He is so loving that he can concentrate entirely on the immediate problem before him. While he is talking to you, he is yours completely. He is thinking of you and of your problem and of nothing else. That great mind vexed with the multitudinous questions of a sub-continent, is for the time being focussed upon you and your little needs. That is a great achievement in the art of love.

We have noticed the Mahatma's love for women and children, and of all fair and lovely things. But he is equally in love with the unlovable. "A loving heart does pity the erring loved one, and loves even when it is itself wounded. It is not love that shines only in fair weather." It is by his love of the outcast and fallen that he most greatly serves them. "It should be an act of faith with every Satyagrahi that there is none so fallen in this world but can be converted by love." His love for the poor, and particularly for the untouchables, expresses itself in an identification with them and their interests. He is not content to attack untouchability, he must himself become an untouchable. Do not call me a Mahatma, he will say, I am a bhangi, a sweeper, an outcast. His attitude to these unfortunate people is guided by the principles of "reason, mercy, pity and love." There can be no swaraj till this evil is removed. "The very beginning of the spiritualisation of politics lies in the banishment, root and branch, of untouchability." One of the earliest lovers of the "untouchables" in Gujarat was the poet Narsinha Mehta, author of the song, "He is a true Vaishnava who knows how to melt at another's woe." Kanu Desai has given us a symbolic picture of the tender and noble spirit of

Narsinha Mehta brooding over the Mahatma and inspiring him with his own great love. In another picture he has shown us the Mahatma in the "untouchable" quarter of a village, his friends crowding about him, bringing their children to him, responding to his love. We should note in both pictures the fragrant and health-giving tulsi plant, venerated by the "untouchables."

Courtesy, concentration, identification are thus aspects of the art of love, but its crown is action. It is love that spurs the Mahatma to his stupendous labours. Love has made him concentrate on the great human needs—God, food, cloth, housing. Love without works is dead. "It is my frequent prayer to God," he told the Textile Labour Union of Ahmedabad, "that He may never separate me from you, and that I may lay down my life in the service of the poor."

Love is thus the simple secret of existence: it is the certain pathway to Truth. "To see the all-pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself."

THE UNIVERSAL SOUL

"PATRIOTISM," said Nurse Edith Cavell on the eve of her execution "is not enough." Mahatma Gandhi's patriotism is not antagonistic to his universalism, but is part of it. He is a fervent patriot. He knows and loves his country as no other living man. He has suffered for her; he would die for her. But for the Mahatma also, "patriotism is not enough." "My patriotism," he has declared again and again, "is not an exclusive thing. It is all-embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or the exploitation of other nationalities. The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always in every case without exception consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large." He has no desire to isolate India from the rest of the world. "Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency." In fact once India gains her freedom, he looks forward to a period of the happiest co-operation and fellowship with other nations. "My goal is friendship with the world." "We shall live for world-brotherhood and die for world-brotherhood."

A free India will have a mission to the whole of mankind. "My mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India, though today it undoubtedly engrosses practically the whole of my life and the whole of my time. But through realisation of freedom of India, I hope to realise and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man." "Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations, inasmuch as we will exploit none just as we will allow none to exploit us. Through swaraj we would serve the whole world."

The picture "East and West" in this collection reveals to us something of the possibilities of intimate fellowship and mutual service between India and England. Here is England at the feet

of India—where she ought to be—making some reparation for the years which India has spent under the feet of England. Such a new relationship of sevice rather than domination will do great honour to England. The picture is a permanent challenge to the people of England to come in humility and love to serve their Indian brothers. The picture also promises those who will do so an untold-of reward of friendship and affection.

The Mahatma, of course, would not himself put it like that. Like Christ, it is his joy "not to be ministered unto, but to minister," and it is his chief desire to enlarge the capacity of his heart till he can serve all humanity. "We must widen the circle of our love till it embraces the whole village, the village in its turn must take into its fold the district, the district the province, and so on till the scope of our love becomes co-terminous with the world."

It has been pointed out that the theoretical ideal of the Vedantin—to be one with all that lives—has become a practical reality in the Mahatma. "My religion and my patriotism derived from my religion embrace all life. I want to realise brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realise identity with all life, even with such beings as crawl on earth." What to the metaphysician is a triumph of intellectual subtlety is to Mahatma Gandhi a supreme adventure of the heart and mind. His love is a reasoned love; it is no sentiment or emotion; it is the fruit of hard thinking; it is in fact a part of Truth. Hence there are no perils to his universalism; it is as strong as Truth itself. Mahatma Gandhi is universal because he has put his selfhood to death; from the funeral-pyre of individualism there rises the triumph of universal love.

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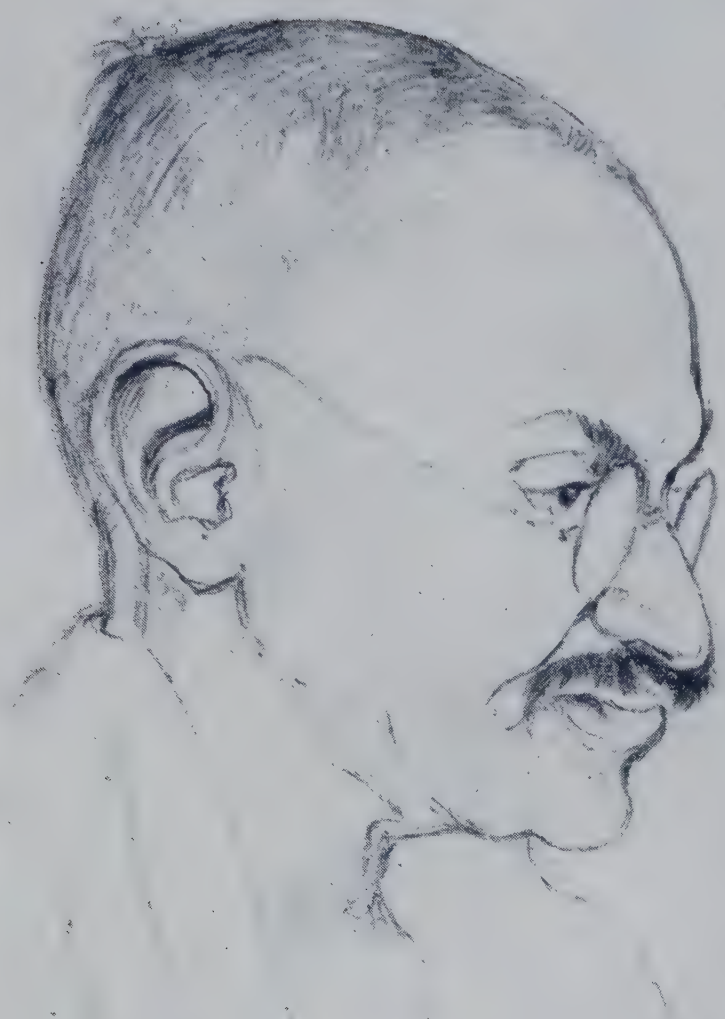

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A Portrait in Pencil
Sketched during Prayers

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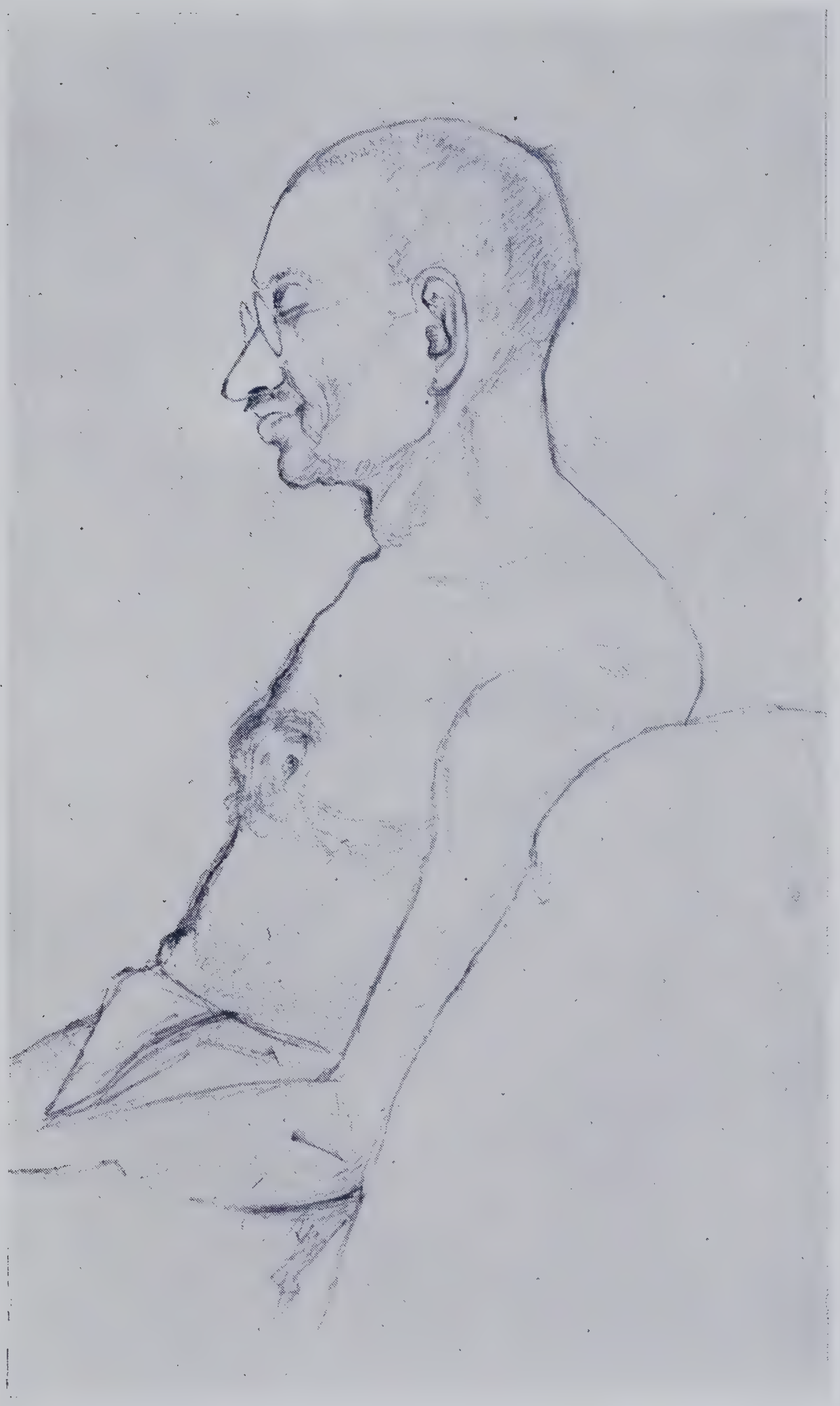

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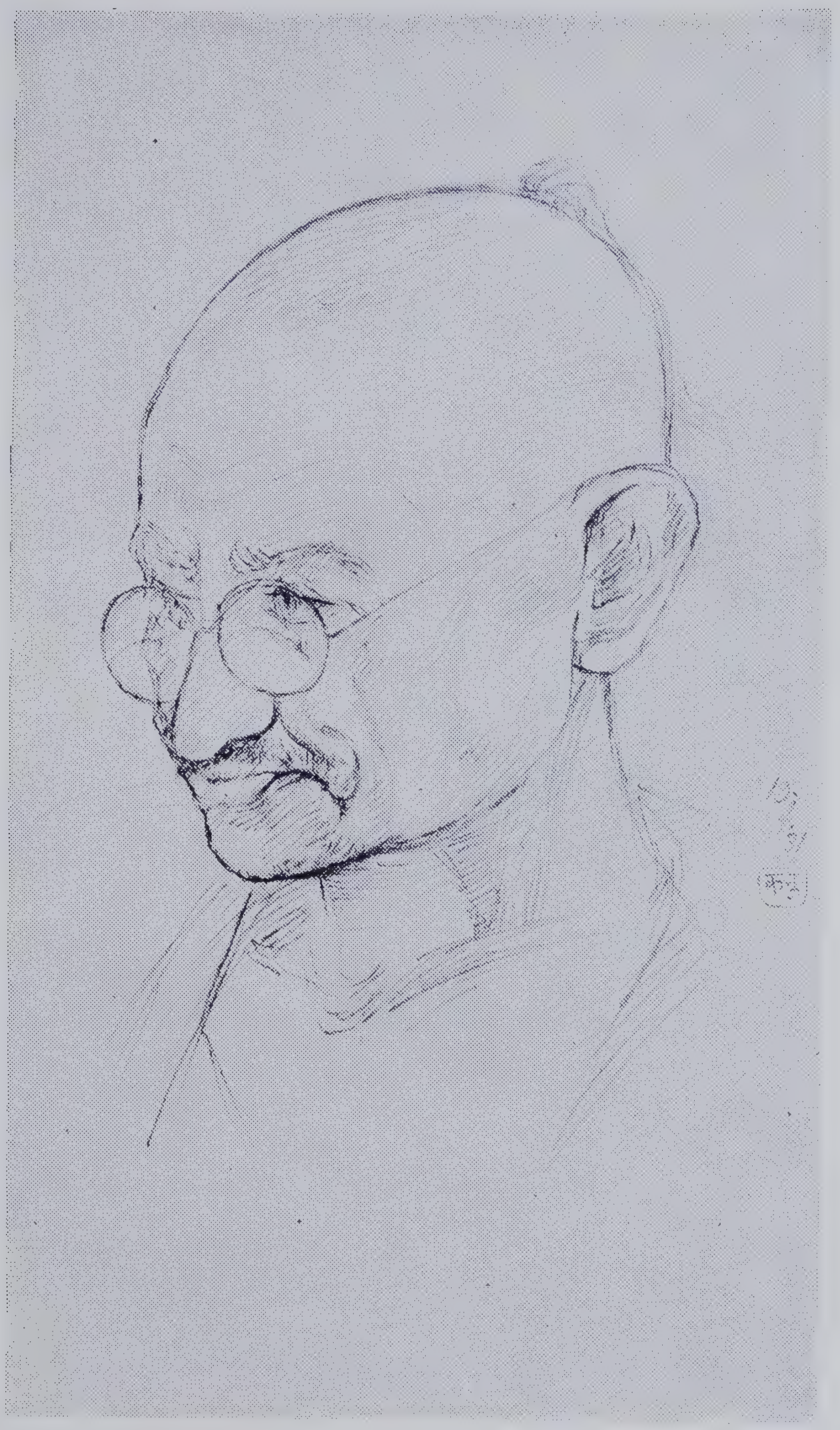

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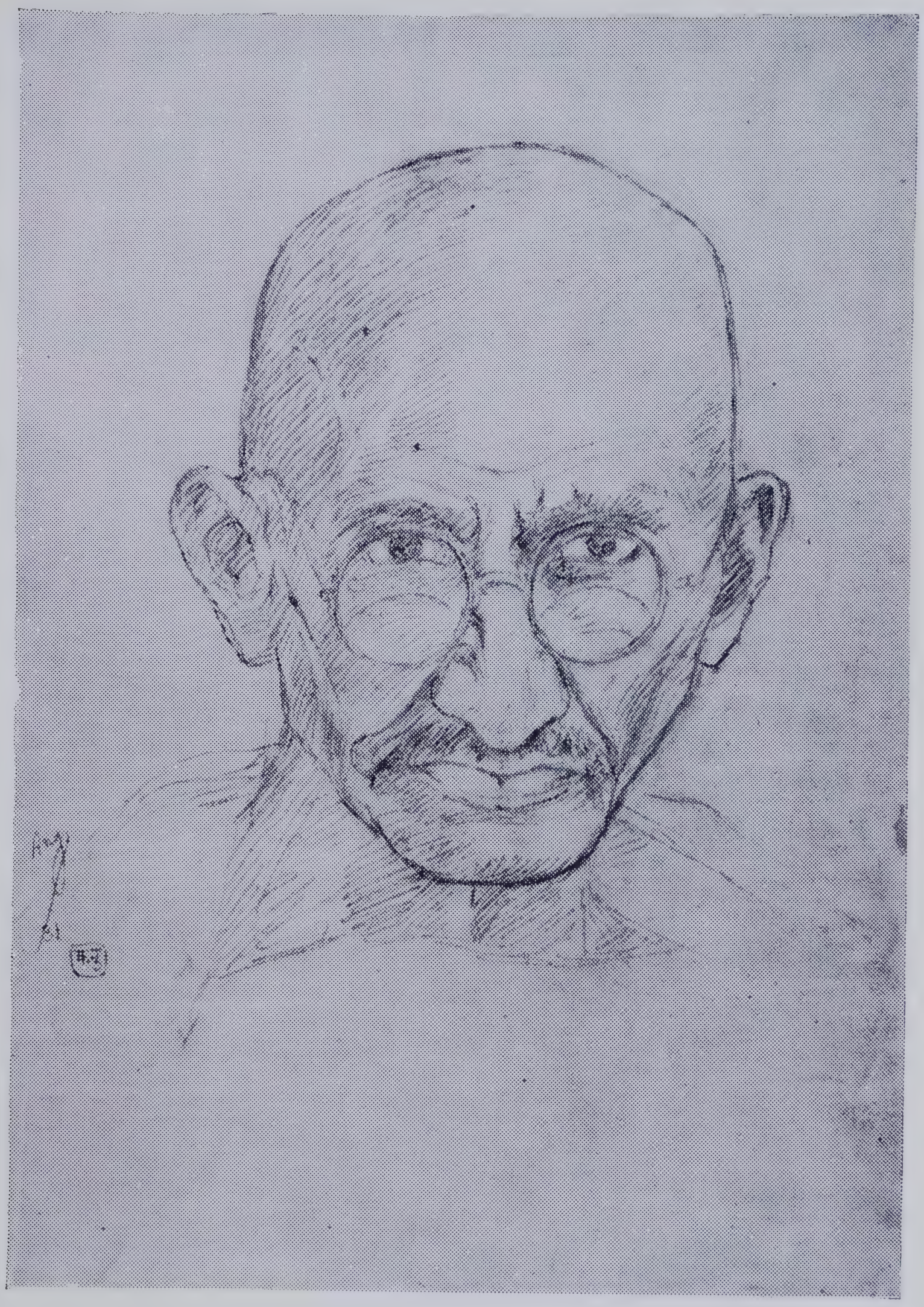

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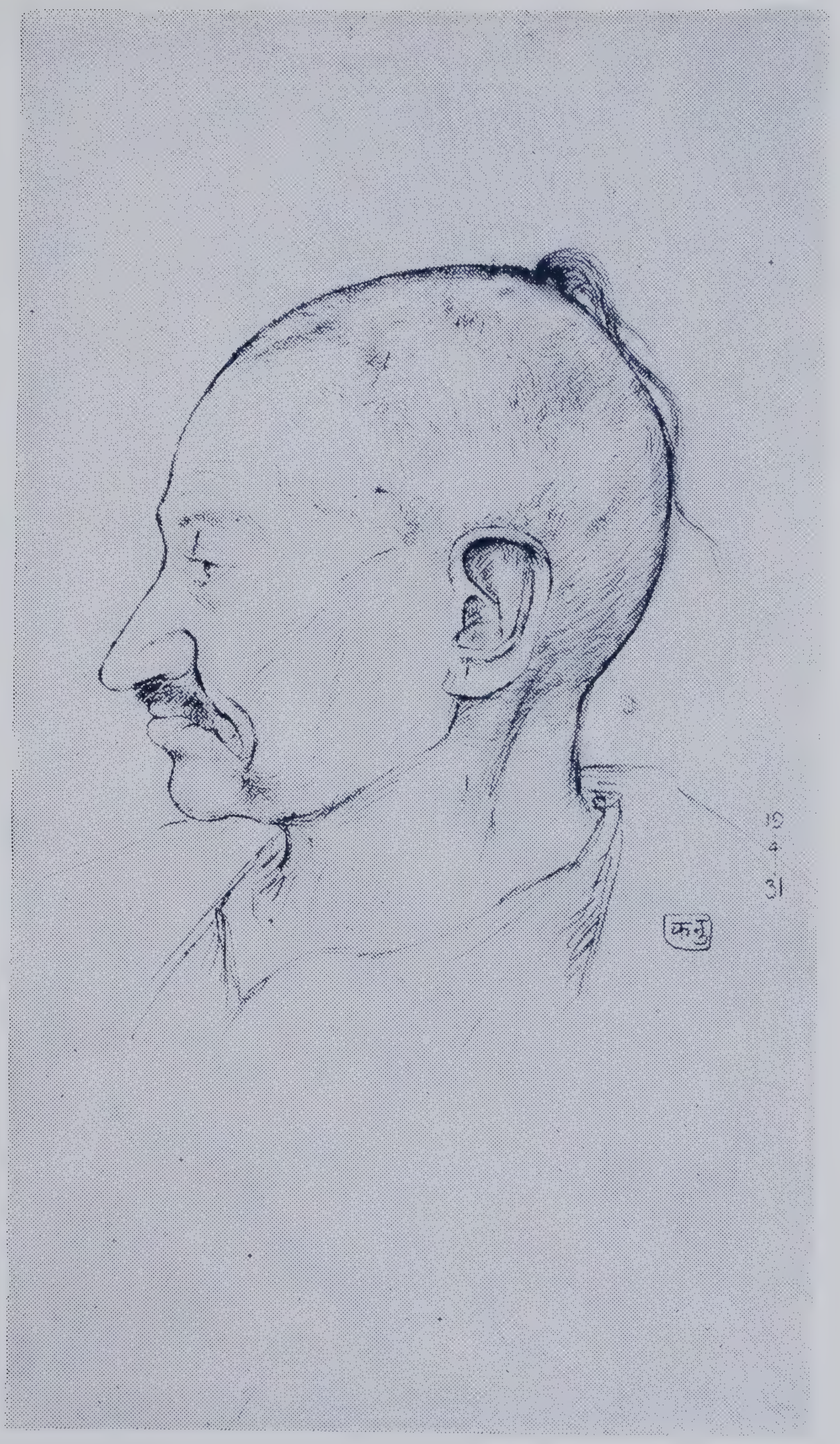
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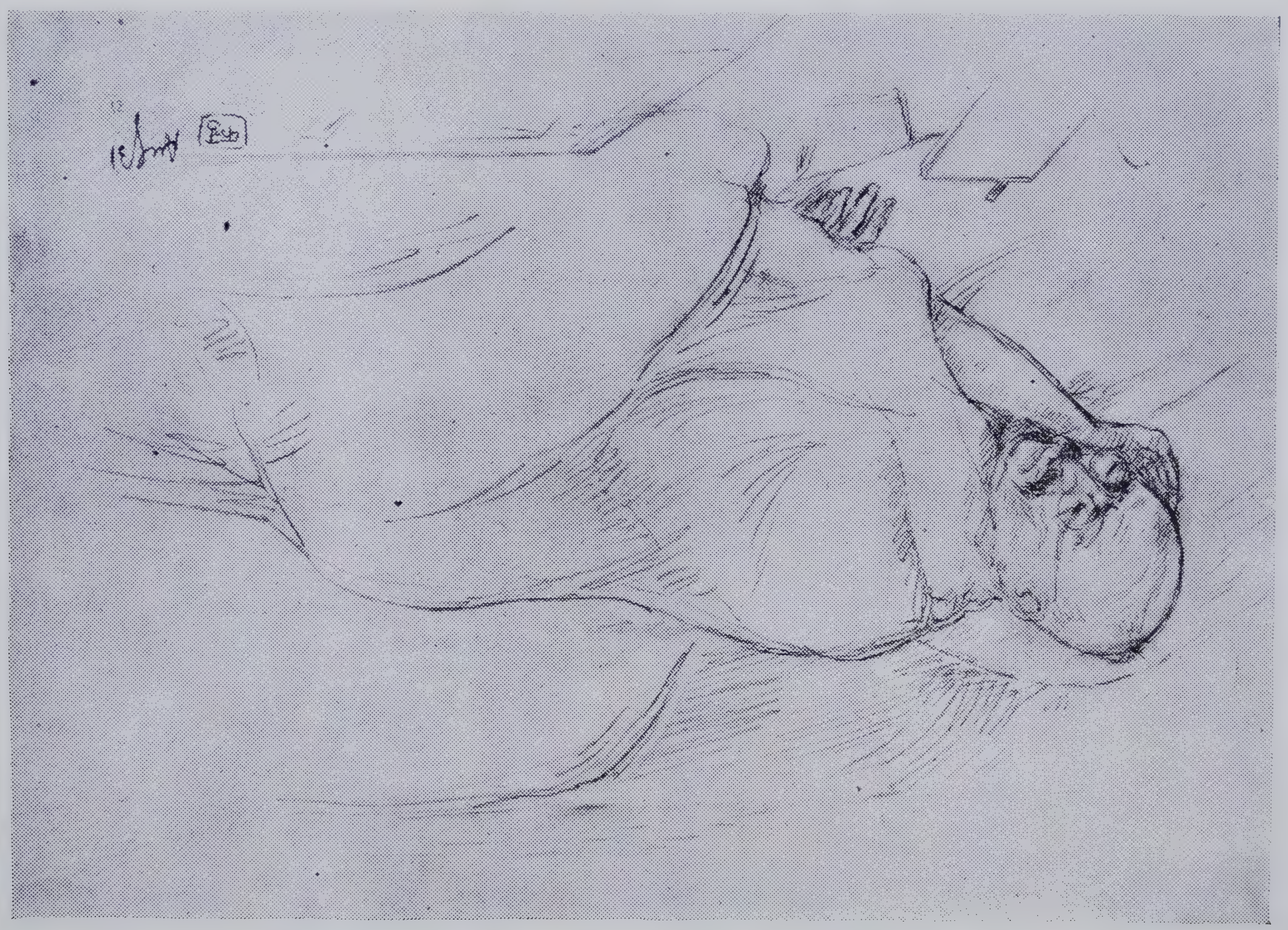

The War-Path

In the Untouchable Quarters

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